

'Three Dimensions of Christian Living'

by A.W. Tozer

A.W. Tozer's sermon emphasizes the necessity of grace in guiding Christians to renounce ungodliness and worldly lusts while living a balanced life of sobriety, righteousness, and godliness.

Scripture: Titus 2:11

Topics: "Christian Living", "Grace and Righteousness"

Description

A.W. Tozer emphasizes the three dimensions of Christian living: sobriety, righteousness, and godliness. He explains that grace teaches believers to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, urging them to have the backbone to stand firm against societal pressures. Tozer highlights that true Christian living involves a balance of self-control, justice towards others, and reverence for God. He encourages Christians to embrace a life of positive action, living soberly and righteously in a world that often promotes the opposite. Ultimately, Tozer calls for a vibrant faith that reflects God's grace and leads to a life of freedom and purpose.

Transcript

Three Dimensions of Christian Living

Pastor and author A.W. Tozer

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Now, we've been talking about grace. From the book of Titus, the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly and righteously and godly in this present world.

Grace divine, how sweet the sound; sweet the grace that I have found, wrote one old brother. Another one said, sweet the sound of grace divine, sweet the grace that makes me Thine. Grace is a charming sound harmonious to the ear, said another one.

Now, that's the grace of God. And I have been talking about it these Sunday mornings. And have said that if the grace of God has reached you, it has taught you also by inward impulse. And the first thing that it teaches is denial. That is, it teaches us to disavow, renounce, and repudiate. And there are two things mentioned here that are to be renounced: ungodliness and worldly lusts. Ungodliness means of course, impiety, irreverence, and whatever is not of God; whatever God is not in. Whatever God's not in is ungodly

by definition, "un" being a negative of God, godly.

Now, the dictates of grace teach us that whatever is ungodly is forthwith to be renounced. Impiety, irreverence, forthwith are to be renounced. And it is to be renounced even if accepted, say, at school. We spend an awful lot of our time in the hands of pagans, an awful lot of time. We start in the preschool classes with finger painting. And we end up with a PhD taken in some university where the name of God is about as welcome as the name of Hitler would have been in the Jewish synagogue. And the schools place their approval tacitly or overtly from lots of things that are still not of God. God isn't in them. They're ungodly.

Either we are not to be Christians or else we are to renounce these ungodly things. Even if, for upwards of twenty years, we have been taught that they're all right in the schools. We are to renounce them even if they are set to music on TV or radio. And many of the things are set to music on TV and radio that are irreverent, ungodly, God-less; that God isn't in them. The fact that they are set to music or illustrated doesn't make them good. The Christian has got to have backbone enough.

You know, there's one kind of person that will never get to heaven; and that is the one without a backbone. The fellow that has no backbone we'll never make it through. Because it takes a certain amount of backbone to deny when everybody else is affirming and to affirm when everybody else is denying. Anybody that thinks a Christian is a weakling, he's never been a Christian. He's never been much around Christians. Any dead fish or dying fish can turn over on his back and float belly up with the stream, but a salmon goes up the Columbia River over falls as high as this building.

And the Christian, the grace of God, and the Word of God unite to teach us that we are to deny ungodliness and renounce it for good even if it is practiced by celebrities. The saints and prophets of the day are the celebrities. And some celebrities practice things that are ungodly. And the fact that they are practiced by widely known people doesn't in any wise mitigate the ungodliness. They're still ungodly, denying ungodliness. And all ungodliness is to be denied by the Christian even if it is found in classic literature.

The fact that Bokorshow or somebody else wrote it, doesn't make it good, doesn't make it godly. It's still dirty if it's dirty and it's still ungodly if it's ungodly. And it isn't better because it's found embalmed in classic art. Go to the Art Institute and you will find some things there God isn't in, and every Christian is to have backbone enough to be sneered at for repudiating such things.

And even if they're approved by our friends, good kind friends who love us. And even if they're practiced by church people, they're still wrong; and even if they're defended by priests or pastors. And outside of murder and adultery, I don't suppose there is any sin anywhere that some priest or pastor won't come out in favor of. Shakespeare said the devil could always quote a text for a purpose. He must have gone to church sometimes anyhow or been among religious people.

Now, if this sounds severe, what I am saying to you my friends, remember what Jesus said: if Thy hand offend thee, cut it off. If thine eye offend thee or cause thee to stumble, pluck it out. For it's better to go to heaven with only one eye and one hand than to go to hell having two of each.

And if he just turned back a page here, to 2 Timothy, Paul says, I charge thee therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and His Kingdom. Preach the Word. Be instant in season and out of season. Reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long suffering and

doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine. But after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers having itching ears. And they shall turn away their ears from the truth and shall be turned unto fables. Watch thou in all things. Endure afflictions. Do the work of evangelist and make full proof of thy ministry.

And then the second is worldly lust. Of course, the old word lust in English. And I looked it up in Greek and it means about the same thing, that is, the original word, which was translated lust, means desires. It means pleasure longing, pleasure longing, longings for pleasure. And these are identified elsewhere in the New Testament by modifiers. I have gone over the New Testament to find them. And there's a modifier called foolish lust. Another one is called hurtful lust, fleshly lust, ungodly lust, former lust in your ignorance, youthful lust and lusts that war in your members.

Now these are here and they're natural to fallen man; perfectly natural to fallen man that he should have foolish, hurtful lust, fleshly ungodly lust. And of course, because they're natural, they're defended; defended and excused by the psychologist and the sociologists and the modern writers and the marriage counselors and consultants. But the Christian doesn't ask advice about them, He renounces them. Because he's taught both inwardly and on the pages of the Book. He's taught on the pages of the Book to renounce worldly lust. And he's taught by the Spirit in his heart to renounce worldly lust. And so, when he picks up a book excusing worldly lust, he turns, shuts it up and turns it away from him, because he's taught inwardly and by the book of God.

Now, God doesn't leave us there. He says, we're to deny, and I've born down heavily upon that. But He doesn't leave us there. God never calls us to dwell in a vacuum, and He never calls us to sterile negativity; negativeness, nothingness, not doing things, not being ungodly, not being lustful, not being unbelieving. He calls us away from those things to something else. He doesn't leave us in a vacuum. He calls us out that He might bring us in.

And so, the indwelling Spirit and the Word agree that we should live. There's your positive word. Deny, there's your negative word. Live, there's your positive word. And just as this electric light has a negative and a positive pole, and if it doesn't have both we have no light Just as this recorder must have juice, it has both negative and positive. If you don't have the two you don't have a recorder. So, the Word of God teaches us that there should be held in suspension the two. We must say no and yes. No to the ungodly, yes to the godly.

Perhaps somebody could get me a glass of water. I got a little laryngitis last Tuesday night. I haven't been able to get free from. I am not sick. And I'm not discouraged. I'm just hindered. Now how shall we live? I remember hearing Churchill one time during the war make a speech and he coughed all the way through it. I remember that and that gives me a little consolation to know that the great Winnie. Thank you, my friend. I don't know if that cures what I have but it may help. I never liked to drink water while I preach because it makes me self-conscious. I always remember a story about the windmill that ran on water.

Now, how should we live? How should we live? Well, thank God, live, live, live. Get that word, live, live. There's a good positive word, live. We should live. We couldn't live before because we were dead. Now we can live. Well, to live soberly, righteously and godly, and in this present world.

And here we have, and I'll be brief with it, the Christians three-dimensional life. These are sobriety, righteousness and godliness. There are your three dimensions for the Christian, sobriety, which means temperance and self-control. This is the self-dimension and has to do with our relation to ourselves. A man

who can't control himself, you're not going to make much of a Christian. Sobriety, self-control, temperance, self-mastery. This is the self-dimension. This is Christianity as relates to me.

And there's righteousness, which means justice, honesty, loving kindness. That's the "others" dimension, or it's Christianity as it relates to others through us.

And then there's godliness. And this is the god dimension, our relation to God: faith, reverence and love. And on those three dimensions, man lives. Christians live if they deny ungodliness and worldly lusts. But if they do not deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, then they're all confused and mixed up. If they do not deny ungodliness they can join a church, but they can't have godliness. And if they do not deny a worldly lust, they may join the church but not have sobriety or temperance or self-control. And if they do not have godliness, and sobriety, how are they going to have righteousness?

So, we find ourselves dwelling there, this triangle, or these three dimensions. Sobriety, that's self-control. We're not much of a people for self-control now. They believed in it once, sober, serious people. And now an unsober, uncontrolled, lawless generation is writing books about those serious-minded, self-controlled, disciplined men who lived their Christianity like a soldier.

They're writing now, I remember Papa, one foot in heaven, chicken every Sunday. How I got on with Grandpa. The young smart alecks of the day who are living in Sodom in lusts and sinful self-indulgence, now write serial comic books about the old Puritans and the men of God who said, let's do right if the heavens fall. And they show some of their extreme and radical beliefs. They had radical beliefs, I suppose. Lot was a radical in Sodom. And Noah was a radical before the flood. Daniel was a radical in Babylon. Luther was a radical in Germany. John Wesley was a radical in a rotten society in England. Maybe they were radical, but they were sober men who were full of the Spirit and who controlled themselves.

Incidentally, that Book of Proverbs, I don't want to steal any of the thunder of the brother who will be giving a series on the book of Proverbs to the young people. But that book of Proverbs deals with that kind of life. It's a grave. Life to the book of Proverbs is a serious thing. There's no yakking and no empty laughing. In fact, it calls laughter, the laughter of fools it says is like the crackling of thorns under a pot. Did you ever try to take dry thorns and light them and put them under a pot to try to cook an egg? Notice how that crackle and pop in all directions and then die down. The old man of God said that's the way of the laughter of fools.

Well, sobriety that's self-controlled, you know, the Holy Ghost is in you, and you're living right. That's your self-dimension. Then there's righteousness, your attitude toward others. The Spirit teaches us both in the Word and in the heart that we're to live righteously toward others. You don't cheat others. You don't rob others, don't lie about others. You don't gossip about others and do them harm.

And then there's godliness; faith, I say, and reverence and love. That comes first. Our attitude toward God is first, but it's put third here because it starts with self and goes up. I am last. My neighbor is next, and God is first. God is first, my neighbor is next, and I am last. That's the way it's supposed to be in the Christian life.

Somebody said, what a cold and colorless life we would live to be sober and righteous and godly. That's just where you're mistaken my friend. That man who fell out with his wife here yesterday or day before yesterday. He went to get her. She wouldn't come back. He drew a gun. She started to run. He started to fire, and he hit her a few times, I guess. He didn't kill her and then turned around and blew whatever that

was he had in his head out. It wasn't brains because his brains were cooked, steaming with fury.

They want me to believe that that is superior to the self-controlled, righteous, God-fearing man who lives his holy life, so he dares to die. They want me to believe that a bunch of shapely mares out in Hollywood nay over the fence; that shapely stallions out in Hollywood; they want me to believe that they are superior to those serious-minded fathers of whom we now make fun and about whom comic books are written; who walked with God and were not, for God took them.

If you want to get your faith up and get your heart helped, go to Plymouth where our fathers landed and read the tombstones. Go on up on the hill and read the tombstones. That's all I want you to do. That's enough for a day. That's Bible enough for a day. You'll get more text there than you would get in University of Chicago. Right there on the hill, men of God lived there. They had their good old bishops with the Bible along with them and said the King James was modernistic. But they carried their Geneva Bible along with them and they read it, righteous men, sober men, godly men. Don't forget, my brethren, that the states were founded mostly by sober men, godly men.

The nation was whittled out, this is close to the Fourth of July. I can wax patriotic and say this nation was whittled out by men who held God in reverence and held their neighbor in loving affection and held themselves in control. The other kind went along for the ride. But the nation was founded by the other kind, this kind: sober, the righteous, the godly. And our hospitals were founded mostly by that kind of people. The very word, hospital, comes up out of a religious context.

When they marched from Europe at the preaching of Peter the Hermit and marched for Jerusalem. They went in there and they built hospitals and called some hospitallers. And almost every alleviation of human suffering and woe that's known in modern society has sprung up out of the Christian ethic, the sober, the righteous, the godly people. And when the human heart goes free, and the human brain runs away, and we have atom bombs, hydrogen bombs, death rays, bacteriological warfare, destruction of cities.

No, my friend, the Holy Ghost isn't calling you to negativity. The Holy Ghost isn't calling you to sit around solemnly like an owl in the daytime, staring unseeingly ahead of your waiting for the end. The Lord is calling you to live. Do you hear that word--live. But live soberly and live righteously.

And the word righteous; always remember, is not a negative word. It's an explosive, dynamic, positive word. The man who determines to live righteously in this unrighteous world is going to have a full-time job on his hands. You say you have nothing to do? You live righteously in an unrighteous world, and you will have something to do.

So, I call you have to renounce. Renounce what? Renounce your prison and take all of God's great out of doors. But until you have renounced your prison, you'll never go free. Renounce your chains and take all the infinite, limitless, liberty of God. And renounce your darkness and take all the shining light of God that shineth more and more unto a perfect day. Sweet the sound of grace divine, sweet the grace that makes me Thine. That's what the grace of God teaches.

He just wants us to be good people, loving people, generous, kindly people, God-fearing people, self-controlled people with temperance and sobriety as a part of our nature. But at the same time, I have all the freedom of God's vast out of doors and all the liberty of the sons of God; all the shining light, the Light of the world pours on us. Amen.

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